AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

PROTESTING WAR:

COMPARING AFGHANISTAN TO VIETNAM

by

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Lt Col George “Marty” Reynolds (BS, United States Air Force Academy and Pennsylvania State University; MBA, Gonzaga University; MA, George Washington University; MS, Air Force Institute of Technology) is a reconnaissance/surveillance/electronic warfare pilot. He has commanded three electronic combat squadrons and completed staff assignments at the wing, center, numbered air force and headquarters Air Force levels. Colonel Reynolds participated and commanded squadrons during multiple contingency operations, including Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and operations in South America. He is a 2011 graduate of the Air War College at Maxwell AFB, Alabama.

Since the divisive Vietnam experience, US Presidents have avoided diplomatic and military intervention in the affairs of other states fearing a negative American public reaction. US involvement in Beirut and Somalia was cut short and the use of ground forces in Kosovo was off the table. "As President H.W. Bush concluded in 1991, a 'Vietnam Syndrome' had taken hold of the public. Bush explained this problem in greater detail: 'I don't think that [public] support [for the 1991 Gulf War] would last if it were a drawn-out conflagration. I think support would erode, as it did in Vietnam.'"[1]

Additionally, foreign adversaries have also made calculated, strategic decisions on the belief Americans are unwilling to support protracted, bloody conflicts. This was especially true in Osama Bin Laden's calculus when he declared war on the US. In fact, in a 1998 ABC News interview he emphasized the symbolic importance of the 1983 Beirut bombing referring to US soldiers as "paper tigers."[2] In a letter to his chief deputy in Iraq, Al Qaeda's number two leader, Zawahiri wrote, "The aftermath of the collapse of American power in Vietnam, and how they ran and left their agents, is noteworthy."[3] As Former US Ambassador Stephen Sestanovich, commented, "Once people start thinking of the current war as being—like its predecessor [Vietnam]—a near-decade of expensive effort going absolutely nowhere, aren't they going to want the boys to come home?"[4] So, given the Afghanistan War is now longer than the Vietnam War, why have Americans not protested to the same degree? By comparing and contrasting George W. Bush and Lyndon Johnson Administrations, this work examines three possible explanations—supporting war rationale, economic sacrifice and personal connection.

Supporting War Rationale

Rationale for war comes in many forms including self defense, honoring an alliance, or preemptive strike to name a few. The conventional wisdom from Vietnam is America will support an administration's rationale for war as long as it supports a vital US interest, but not indefinitely. President Johnson's rationale and his escalation of the Vietnam War might best be described by three incremental measures—the US Containment Policy, the Domino Theory, and the Congressional Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

During the Cold War, the US's dominate geo-political strategy was based on National Security Council Report 68, which advocated a policy of containment towards the Soviet Union specifically, but communism in general. Initially, Vietnam did not play a center role. In fact, when Lyndon Johnson became president in 1963, the US decades-long involvement in Vietnam was limited to military aid and advisors. Yet, in 1964 Johnson and his advisors became increasingly concerned with the stability of South Vietnam and contemplated using US combat forces in order to contain North Vietnam and fight the Viet Cong insurgency in line with the broader US Containment Policy. However, concerns about South Vietnam went further than just containing Soviet aggression.

Proponents of the burgeoning Domino Theory argued that if one nation fell to communism, then neighboring nations would fall too—like dominos. As such, should Vietnam come under communist rule, then other nations in Southeast Asia would likely follow suit. As Secretary of State Rusk wrote, "Withdrawal from Vietnam would mean not only grievous losses to the free world in Southeast Asia but a drastic loss of confidence in the will and capacity of the free world to oppose aggression."[5] But it was not just the administration and military who believed in the Domino Theory. "In a February 1965 Harris poll, an overwhelming majority (78

percent to 10 percent) said they believed that if the United States withdrew from South Vietnam, 'the Communists would take over all of Southeast Asia.'"[6]

Prior to the Tonkin Gulf incident, the Johnson Administration had not committed US combat forces. His early 1964 National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 288 stated, "'The Vietnamese must win their own fight,' and the US must aid its ally 'by means short of the unqualified use of US combat forces.'"[7] However, "by the summer of 1964, the remedies prescribed in NSAM 288 were all proving inadequate."[8] Following the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf incident, Johnson ordered air strikes against North Vietnamese targets and called for a Congressional resolution. At Johnson's urgent request, Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, giving the President the power "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the US and to prevent further aggression."[9] The resolution gave the President the right to pursue military action in Vietnam without a declaration of war. Johnson not only relied on the resolution as legal justification for war but used it as rationale for escalating the conflict.[10] Most importantly, public opinion rallied behind the President. A Harris survey taken before the Tonkin Gulf incident showed a 42 percent disagreement with Johnson's handing of Vietnam; afterwards, 72 percent approved.[11]

Regardless of how strongly Johnson or his advisors deemed their rationale for war was (Containment, Domino Theory, or repel armed attack against US forces), they had to maintain domestic and international support. However, the strongest criticism of Johnson's handling of Vietnam was his covertness with the public. For example, in April 1965, "when the President acceded to 'enclave strategy' involving US troops in offensive action, he ordered his advisers not to tell the press. Only on 9 June 1965, when a State Department spokesman released the news by mistake, did it become public knowledge that Marines were being used in ways beyond airbase

security details."[12] Consequently, it did not take long for opposition to stir within the US. In the summer of 1965, the New York Times warned of the "lives lost, blood spilt and treasure wasted" and faculty members at prestigious universities staged all-night "teach-ins" on Vietnam. [13, 14]

So why did Johnson advocate covertness if he had three solid war rationale arguments? Some have claimed Johnson could not choose between his domestic legislation and avoiding Saigon's fall. "But every month of innovative social legislation may have been a gain worth purchasing, in his eyes, even if it later cost him dear in credibility—which means that covertness was a necessity to wring out every month he could before the war caught up with him."[15] Credibility and covertness aside, Johnson's war rationale lost its momentum as the American public began questioning if the anti-communism basis for US involvement was enough or if the failure of defending the Domino Theory would actually lead to communism reaching the US.

In contrast, neither national security theory nor an incremental rationale precipitated the Afghanistan War. On 9 September 2001, Al Qaeda conducted a multi-prong attack on the US with lethal results killing 2,819 people from 115 nations.[16] Although the fatal act was executed by a non-state actor, it was an act of war conducted on America soil. Consequently, President Bush's war rationale might best be described by two primary factors—the 9/11 attacks and the broader war on terror.

Following 9/11, many in the US held the opinion the attacks changed the world. As President Bush stated in his post-9/11 speech, "Americans have known wars, but for the past 136 years they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known the casualties of war, but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning."[17] Unlike previous war, the Bush Administration's strategy relied on a mix of military action, diplomacy, intelligence, law enforcement, and financial influence to confront Al Qaeda, which

required tremendous multilateral support. And America's response received overwhelming international approval. In fact, because the attacks were deemed to be within the parameters of its charter, NATO invoked Article 5 enabling its full participation in Afghanistan. Domestically, Bush's leadership and policies received tremendous support as well. Following the attacks, Bush's job approval rating soared to 90 percent.[18]

Beyond the initial attack rationale, Bush expanded the scope of America's response. He linked the perpetrators of the attack, Al Qaeda, to a nation state, Afghanistan and its Taliban regime that "threatened people everywhere by sponsoring and sheltering and supplying terrorists."[19] He further defined America's new security policy stating, "From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime."[20]

By expanding the initial national security interest beyond Al Qaeda and Afghanistan, Bush defined the context for a broader war on terror. Bush viewed the attacks not as a single event, but a global ideological threat on par with fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism.[21] In fact, 9/11 underscored Al Qaeda's capacity to plan and execute lethal attacks from safe havens within Afghanistan, as well as linked their previous acts to their larger war efforts against the US. For example, the 1992 Aden, Yemen hotel bombings, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1998 Kenya and Tanzania embassy attacks, and the 2000 USS Cole bombing were all conducted by Al Qaeda operatives. By expanding his war rationale, Bush gave the administration flexibility to act beyond Afghanistan. All terrorist attacks, support networks, affiliations, and connections between terrorists and nation states were considered likely threats and provided a framework for possible US response.

In contrast to the Domino Theory, the US did not have to wait for enough dominos to fall to directly affect the US. The 9/11 attack connected a string of attacks on the US and its Allies while Al Qaeda continued to pose a threat. Terrorists executed attacks at numerous locations including Istanbul, Madrid, London, and Amman, reminding Americans the threat remained. Moreover, popular support for Afghanistan's war rationale remained high throughout the Bush Presidency. Although Bush's job approval rating declined to 25 percent by 2008, when asked if the US made a mistake in sending military forces to Afghanistan, 70 percent of those surveyed said no. [22]

Economic Sacrifice

"During most of America's wars, parochial desires—such as tax breaks for favored groups or generous spending for influential constituencies—have been sacrificed to the greater good. The President and both parties in Congress have come together to cut nonessential spending and increase taxes."[23] Although numerous administrations tried to conduct a war and still support expanding domestic agendas, they all retreated and were forced to reduce their burgeoning domestic programs in favor of more pressing military operations. Vietnam was no exception. Johnson was not only engaged in an increasingly expensive war, but was also initiating an aggressive domestic agenda. "He knew that previous twentieth-century presidents were unable to prevent defense spending from undercutting their domestic programs."[24] Anticipating Congress and America's insistence on choosing either war or domestic reform, he made a calculated decision to do both. He reassured Americans no major tax or spending changes were necessary, "calmly asserting that the conflict in Vietnam would not divert resources from Medicare, Medicaid, and other domestic programs." The administration asked Congress to pay for the war via supplemental requests and not through the traditional

congressionally authorized appropriations. But "this approach soon lost credibility with Congress and the American people. As troop levels reached 365,000 in 1966—double that of 1965—the war's costs soared and public discontent rose."[25]

In 1968, Congressional and public pressure forced the Johnson Administration to switch tactics to pay for the war and his domestic agenda. He decided to address the $28 billion deficit by borrowing, taxing and saving. Specifically, Congress imposed a 10 percent surtax which raised revenue by about 1 percent of GDP.[26] By war's end the overall total military costs were $708 billion.[27] At its peak in 1968, defense spending accounted for 9 percent of GDP of which war costs equaled 2.3 percent of GDP."[28,29]

By 1968, war expenditures rose by more than 50 percent.[30] Although this caused little economic disruption during the early 1960s, the surge in military purchases triggered inflationary pressures. In 1969, the consumer price index soared to 6 percent, making consumer borrowing more expensive (See Figure 1 for Annual Inflation Rates).[31] Johnson faced a dilemma—he needed the economy to continue growing to pay for the war and domestic programs, but he benefited from inflation as it pushed taxpayers into higher tax rates which in turn increased government revenues. Although Americans were not initially asked to sacrifice financially nor did they feel the effects from inflation or rising interest rates until the later 1960s, Johnson's policies could not be sustained. Americans were in fact asked to sacrifice via excise taxes, and paid indirect economic costs through inflation. Additionally, "by pretending that the war would be relatively inexpensive, Johnson also failed to prepare Americans for the additional tax burdens that eventually would come and heightened their distrust of the administration."[32] Johnson's taxing policies eventually led an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 people conducting a

tax protest by refusing to pay their telephone excise taxes and another 20,000 resisting to paying all or part of their income taxes.[33]

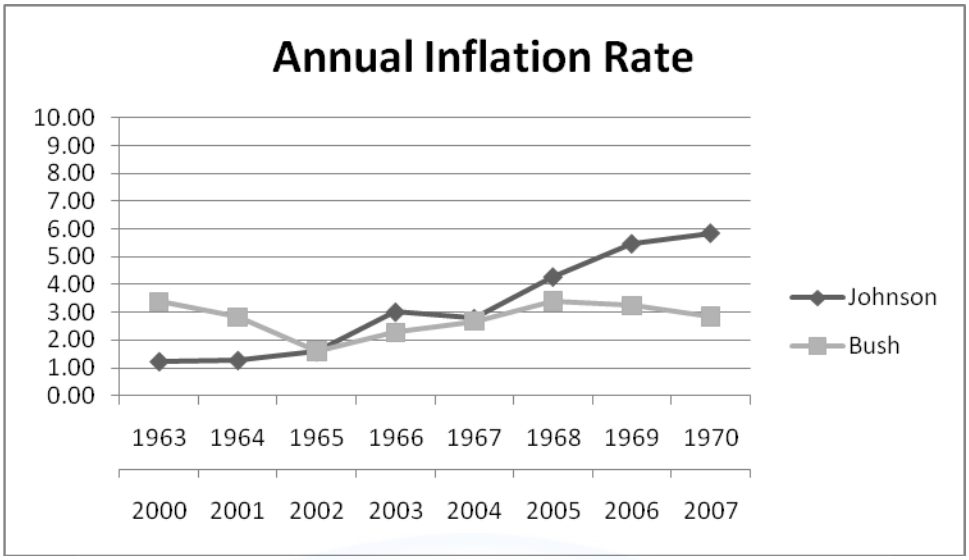

Figure 1: Annual Inflation Rate Data

In contrast, "the approach taken by the Bush Administration and Congress to financing the US role in Afghanistan had been a substantial departure from past practices."[34] "The administration and a Republican Congress increased domestic spending while pursuing their primary goal of cutting taxes—repeatedly—adding more than $2 trillion to the national debt. Additionally, in 2003, Bush signed legislation to create a Medicare prescription drug benefit, the biggest expansion of the federal health program for the elderly since its creation in 1965."[35] Instead of reducing spending on non-essential priorities and raising taxes to offset the deficit, Congress and the administration increased spending, made large tax cuts and paid for the agenda exclusively through borrowing. Bush's approach was similar to Johnson's initial financial policies—to conduct a war and still enact a large domestic agenda without increasing taxes. Yet, Johnson retreated and was forced to reduce his burgeoning programs in favor of more pressing military operations. Remarkably, Bush not only financed two wars, increased homeland security

spending, expanded a major social program but also cut taxes. So how was his administration able to accomplish this where Johnson failed?

Part of the answer lies in a world financial system able and willing to lend vast amounts to the US. "In 2006, foreign private investors and governments bought over half of all newly issued Treasury securities, which meant that foreigners financed over half of the US budget deficit."[36] For comparison, in 1974 foreign holdings accounted for $42 billion, but by 2009 this amount ballooned to $9.6 trillion (in non-inflation adjusted dollars).[37] This large and eager foreign capital market provided the administration and Congress an opportunity previous presidents did not possess. "Bush Administration officials said the 21st-century economy is different from that of the 1960s, when the U.S. government had no easy access to cheap capital. And the low cost of borrowing today [2007] makes a rising debt worth the investment in the safety and security of Americans."[38] In fact, from 2002 through 2004 the federal funds rate remained at historically low levels (See Figure 2 for Annual Federal Funds Rates).

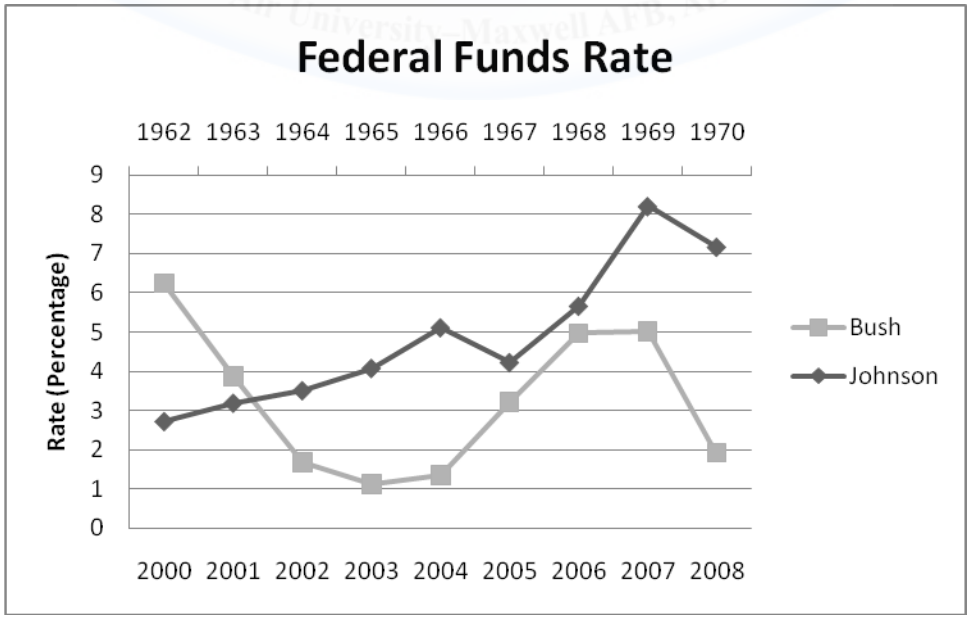

Figure 2: Annual Federal Funds Rate [39]

For the average US taxpayer, this reliance on foreign debt meant no taxes to finance the Afghanistan War. Indeed, due to the Bush tax cuts a family of four with an annual household income of $50,000 saved over $2,900 per year.[40] Yet, despite how the war was paid, the costs added up. According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost close to $1 trillion thus far.[41]

However, although direct and indirect economic costs are significant and climbing, the total dollars spent has not exceeded the amounts spent during previous conflicts. In 2007, "spending in Afghanistan amounted to less than 1 percent of the total economy—about as much as Americans spent shopping online and less than half what they spent at Wal-Mart, while total defense spending was 4 percent of gross domestic product."[42] The massive growth in the US economy over recent decades accounts for some of the disparity when spending is normalized by GDP. Additionally, as a percentage of the overall federal budget, defense spending has declined to below 50 percent compared to the Vietnam War.[43] Furthermore, unlike the Vietnam War, inflation and interest rates remained low throughout the 2000s (See Figures 1 and 2). Where previous administrations worried about the pressures large borrowing placed on inflation and subsequent interest rate adjustments, Bush's approach did not experience either.

So why didn't inflation or other economic factors cause the Bush Administration to ask Americans to make an economic sacrifice reminiscent to Vietnam? There are a number of possible factors. First, labor costs were held in check as US competitors moved labor-intensive business overseas, labor unions and employees did not demand drastic wage increases, and unemployment was relatively stable. Second, the traditional competition between military goods and consumer goods during war largely faded. Although military products still compete for similar raw materials, the uniqueness of today's military hardware requires specific industrial

capacity not found in the private sector. Finally, US economic expansion relative to military spending reduced the impact war traditionally places on America's industry sector. Consequently, Americans did not ask Bush to reevaluate his financial approach. The direct and indirect economic costs of the Afghanistan War were negligible.

Personal Connection

Measuring an individual's personal connection to a war is difficult. Organizations can estimate dissatisfaction via public opinion polls and surveys, but there is no clear measure indicating the degree to which a personal connection will become active protesting. War is very personal with different meaning for different people. However, the personal connection differences between Vietnam and Afghanistan might best be described by three influences—direct involvement, the draft and changes to the anti-war movements.

There are few clearer acts connecting a person to war than military service. Wars take on a new meaning when an individual engages in combat. The connection is also very strong for those related to or friends with military service members, especially when they serve in hostile environments. It would be challenging to quantify or rank order the strength of these connections due to a person's family tie or friendship since each relationship is unique. However, it would follow that as more people serve, the number of direct relationships increases. According to Veterans Administration, 8.74 million military members (9.7 percent of those of military age) were on active duty during the Vietnam War of which 2.59 million served in the Southeast Asia Theater.[44, 45] At peak strength there were over 543,000 service members in Southeast Asia Theater.[46]

Year	Troops in Vietnam	Year	Troops in Afghanistan
1963	15,620	2002	5,200
1964	17,280	2003	10,400
1965	129,611	2004	15,200
1966	317,007	2005	19,100
1967	451,752	2006	20,400
1968	537,377	2007	23,700
1969	510,054	2008	30,100
1970	390,278	2009	50,700

Figure 3: US Troops on the Ground [47,48]

Additionally, over 58,000 service members died, ranking Vietnam fourth on the list of US war fatality totals.[49] Of those that died 17,539 were married and 61 percent were under the age of 21.[50] Moreover, some 150,000 military members required hospital care, giving Vietnam a ratio of 1 death to every 2.6 wounded.[51] In total, Vietnam's impact was directly felt by millions through military service or direct relationships, especially for those that experienced tragic death and life altering wounds.

Year	Fatalities in Vietnam	Year	Fatalities in Afghanistan
1963	118	2001	12
1964	206	2002	49
1965	1,863	2003	48
1966	6,143	2004	52
1967	11,153	2005	99
1968	16,592	2006	98
1969	11,616	2007	117
1970	6,081	2008	155

Figure 2: US Fatalities per Year [52,53]

What may have made Vietnam even more personal was its accessibility via television. It was the first war where media outlets were able to broadcast graphic, unedited battlefield footage to a large viewership providing even those loosely connected a front row seat. Many images were shocking and at times were in stark contrast with the reports given by the White House and Pentagon. Additionally, as the anti-war movement grew, the media covered the dissent and domestic rallies within the US. Although the views of dissidents and protesters were typically excluded from coverage, television provided the anti-war movement an audience.[54]

While this anti-war movement was often motivated by morale and pragmatic arguments, the draft was a major catalyst. Critics argued local draft board's discretion on who to draft or exempt were too broad and not nationally standardized. They also contended deferment rules such as the college deferment, favored those that could afford higher education. Although controversial, the draft did enlist over 648,000 military draftees or 25 percent of the total force in the Southeast Asia Theater who accounted for over 30 percent of the combat deaths. [55]

Yet, it is difficult to take raw service data, media changes and an anti-war movement to determine the type of connection (negative or positive), the strength, or if attitudes and opinions changed when an individual serves, dies, or is wounded. But as the number of casualties grows then personal connections are more than likely to strengthen. When the prospects of involuntary service via the draft are added, regardless if the total number is relatively small, having an even slight probability of becoming a draftee will strengthen more personal connections. For many Americans, the combination of a large number of military members serving, changes in media, a contentious draft, and civic unrest makes their connection to the Vietnam War exceptionally strong.

In contrast, the Afghanistan War involved few Americans directly. In 2001, the total number of military members serving (active, guard and reserve) was 1.55 million personnel or 1.1 percent of Americans of military age.[56] The number of military members deployed to Afghanistan was also significantly less. During the Bush years, the total number of US troops in Afghanistan never exceeded 36,000.[57] However, unlike Vietnam, America was engaged in another major conflict which competed for resources. Yet, even without the additional commitment in Iraq, it is not clear Bush and his military advisors would have pressed for a larger military footprint in Afghanistan. Additionally, the number of hostile deaths and wounded in Afghanistan were less than 650 and 2,650 respectively.[58] It was the second lowest casualty rate of any major US conflict.[59] In fact, due to advances in combat medical care the ratio of deaths to wounded improved to 1 death for every 4.4 wounded.[60]

What is strikingly different about Afghanistan is all military members that served were volunteers. Some have argued the lack of a draft is the single biggest reason Americans are not protesting today as they did during Vietnam. Commentator Brent Green asked, "Given such unfavorable public opinion polls, why does the war in Afghanistan rumble and tumble onward? What single significant variable is different today?"[61] His response, "Millions of American men today between 18 and 25 do not face involuntary military duty, and this may help explain a lack of resounding and unavoidable public demonstrations against today's wars."[62]

Yet, there has been an anti-war movement in the US during the Bush Administration. In 2003, an estimated 150,000 to 250,000 demonstrated in San Francisco and between 200,000 and 500,000 marched in Washington D.C. protesting the lead up to the Iraq War. But in the end, the anti-war movement did not change or influence any major policy changes. In fact, despite the protests, America did go to war in Iraq. Moreover, as the New York Times reported, "The

playbook for opposing a war changed markedly since the street-protest ethos of the anti-Vietnam movement. Instead of a freewheeling circus managed from college campuses and coffee houses, the new antiwar movement is a multimillion-dollar operation run by media-savvy professionals."[63] Anti-war lobbyist Tom Matzzie acknowledged, "Last time [it] was done in the streets [where] people were concerned about civil society breaking down. You have to play in politics, which is something we do very explicitly [today]."[64]

Additionally, "the Internet, not the street, not the campus, is the fundamental component of today's antiwar movement—a force for organizing, raising money and influencing politicians and the media via blogs and e-mail messages."[65] Political organizer Leslie Cagan remarked, "The Internet is a mixed blessing. It's a tremendous asset in terms of getting the word out, announcing activities, everything from meetings to mass mobilization. I also think it has undermined a little the more traditional approach to organizing, where you go and knock on doors and talk to people."[66] Yet, this approach has not produced its intended goal—ending the war. Despite its aims, the anti-war movement did not find those with strong personal connections and/or those who oppose the war in large numbers. Given the small number of Americans serving in the military and Afghanistan specifically, the lack of a draft, and the professionalization of the anti-war movement, few Americans are directly connected to the war in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

So why have Americans not protested to the same degree as they did during Vietnam? One could infer that because Americans have not protested to the same degree, policy makers inoculated the American public against the Vietnam Syndrome—that Americans are now willing to support protracted, bloody conflicts. Yet, this would be an incorrect conclusion. Clearly, we

see a stark difference between Vietnam and Afghanistan along war rationale, economic sacrifice, and personal connection explanations (See Figure 5).

	Vietnam	Afghanistan
War Rationale	US Attacked: No Global War: Yes	US Attacked: Yes Global War: Yes
Economic Sacrifice	Taxes Increased: Yes Peak Inflation: 5.84% (‘69) Peak Fed Funds Rate: 8.21% (’69) War Spending % GDP: 2.3% Defense Spending % GDP: 9%	Taxes Increased: No Peak Inflation: 3.39% (‘05) Peak Fed Funds Rate: 5.02% (’07) War Spending % GDP: 1% Defense Spending % GDP: 4%
Personal Connection	Draft: Yes % Draftees in Theater: 25% Died: 58,220 [67] Wounded: 153,303 [68] % of military age serving: 9.7% Stationed in Theater (Peak): 543k	Draft: No % Draftees in Theater: 0% Died: 630 [69] Wounded: 3,162 [70] % of military age serving: 1.1% Stationed in Theater (Peak): >36k

Figure 5: Comparison between Vietnam and Afghanistan

Unlike Vietnam, America was attacked on 9/11, providing a much clearer war rationale which was strongly supported by the American people. Additionally, the broader global threat remained as terrorist attacks occurred around the world while Osama Bin Laden was still at large and Al Qaeda remained active and relevant. Economically, US citizens did not pay higher taxes or felt any indirect economic costs such as higher inflation or interest rates. Indeed, most Americans saw their tax burdens decrease throughout the war. Finally, the Afghanistan War did not rely on conscription. It was waged by a much smaller, all-volunteer force where only 1.1 percent of Americans of military age served in the military and a significantly fewer died or were wounded. Additionally, society and the playbook for opposing war had changed. Although there were instances of large street protests, the anti-war movement became more professionalized with information and communication advantages protestors in the 1960s did not

possess. However, the anti-war movement thus far, has been unable to grow in numbers or achieve its aim—ending or limiting the war.

Instead of curing the Vietnam Syndrome or its symptoms, the Bush Administration insulated the American public from it. It formulated and executed policies that neutralized the nagging problems that Johnson had previously faced. Whether these decisions were made with Vietnam in mind or were implemented due to political ideology (tax breaks for example) can be debated, but the result was an American public largely distanced from the direct, day-to-day effects of a prolonged conflict. Although America was directly attacked, taxpayers did not pay higher taxes (in fact, paid less), young Americans were not subject to a draft, and the country did not experience the loss of a large number of its citizens. These facts are especially striking when compared to Vietnam. By 1967, America had not been attacked by either the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese, Johnson recommended a 10 percent surtax to cover the increasing costs, the draft calls exceeded 30,000 draftees per month, over 13,000 Americans had died, and polls for the first time indicated a majority of Americans felt the US erred in intervening in Vietnam.[71]

While there will be tendency to compare future wars with the more current Afghanistan conflict while Vietnam's lessons fade, policy makers must take into account the factors that eroded America's support during the Vietnam conflict. They must consider the strength of their war rationale, the economic sacrifices asked of Americans, and the intensity of direct personal connections to an extended war. Despite the fact Americans have not protested to the same degree as they did during 1960s, the primary lesson from Vietnam remains—positive, public support during protracted, open-ended wars with numerous casualties is not guaranteed. Future policy makers cannot forget this hard lesson.

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